

Message Text

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43

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-12 IO-12

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FM AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4604

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E. O. 11652: XGDS: DECLAS 1/1/80

TAGS: PINT, EI

SUBJ: PRESIDENTIAL CONTEST COULD BE TIGHT

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: BOTH PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES HAVE PLEDGED TO EXPAND OFFICE' S ROLE, BUT THEY HAVE LITTLE CONSTITUTIONAL SCOPE TO DO SO EXCEPT IN NATIONAL EMERGENCY OF AN UNLIKELY KIND. BOTH WOULD, HOWEVER, BE MORE ACTIVE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS THAN DE VALERA, AND BOTH MIGHT BE MORE INTERESTED IN FOREIGN TRAVEL. PRESIDENTIAL RACE MAY WELL BE CLOSE, BUT IS OF LITTLE INTERNATIONAL INTEREST. END SUMMARY.

2. LABOR PARTY, AS EXPECTED, HAS AGREED SUPPORT T. F. O' HIGGINS' CANDIDACY FOR MAY 30 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. THIS IS NOT APPROACH FOLLOWED DURING RECENT GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN, WHEN LABOR AND FINE GAEL RAN INDIVIDUAL PARTY CANDIDATES BUT CONVINCED VOTERS TO TRANSFER LOWER PREFERENCES TO COALITION PARTNERS. SOME GOVT MEMBERS WOULD HAVE PREFERRED FOLLOW SAME TACTICS IN PRESIDENTIAL RACE. NOW THAT PARTIES ARE WORKING TOGETHER IN POWER, HOWEVER, INDIVIDUAL PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS MIGHT HAVE BEEN DIVISIVE.

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3. ERSKINE CHILDERS, ALSO PREDICTABLY, ACCEPTED FIANNA FAIL'S INVITATION TO RUN FOR PRESIDENCY. HE WAS VISIBLY-- AND HONESTLY-- RELUCTANT TO LEAVE ACTIVE POLITICS, BUT ACCEPTED OBLIGATION TO RUN IN INTERESTS OF PARTY. IN HIS ACCEPTANCE SPEECH, HE SAID THAT HE HAD ENTERED RACE ON UNDERSTANDING THAT HE WOULD " BE ABLE TO EXPAND THE DIMENSION AND CHARACTER OF THE PRESIDENCY, AND ONLY ON THAT CONDITION." THIS COULD HAVE BEEN READ AS IMPLYING CRITICISM OF DE VALERA, WHO HAS PLAYED ROLE THAT IS BOTH SMALL AND STRICTLY CREMONIAL-- PERHAPS FOR REASONS OF CONVICTION AND PERHAPS BECUASE OF ADVANCED AGE. CHILDERS MADE FEW SPECIFIC PROPOSALS ON " EXPANDED DIMENSION", BUT SUGGESTED THAT PRESIDENT SHOULD BE ABLE " TO GIVE GUIDANCE AND REFLECT THE MOST RESPONSIBLE ASPIRATIONS OF THE PEOPLE ON MATTERS WHERE DISCUSSION AND DEBATE WOULD NOT CREATE DIVISION." THIS APPEARED TO BE A REFERENCE TO IRISH UNITY. LATER ON, HE SAID SPECIFICALLY THAT HE BELIEVED PRESIDENT HAD A RIGHT TO SPEAK ABOUT RECONCILIATION IN NI. HE WOULD, HOWEVER, " DISLIKE MY (PROTESTANT) RELIGION TO BE SEEN TO ADVANCE ANY CAUSE I REPRESENTED."

4. O' HIGGINS HAS ALSO SAID THAT " PRESIDENT SHOULD PLAY A POSITIVE ROLE IN CHARTING THE FUTURE OF THIS NATION" AND SHOULD CONSIDER TELLING IRELAND'S STORY ABROAD. HE BELIEVED THAT " AN ACTIVE AND CONCERNED PRESIDENT" COULD HELP MOVE IRISH PEOPLE CLOSER TOGETHER.

5. BOTH PM COSGRAVE AND EX- PM LYNCH ARE CAMPAIGNING ACTIVELY FOR THEIR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES, EMPHASIZING IMPORTANCE OF RACE AS POLITICAL PRIZE FOR ONE PARTY OR THE OTHER. O' HIGGINS IS STILL CONSIDERED FRONT- RUNNER, BUT ODDS HAVE NARROWED NOW THAT CHILDERS HAS ENTERED RACE WITH PARTIAL REJECTION OF DE VALERA PRECEDENT. NEITHER CANDIDATE HAS MUCH PERSONAL CHARISMA, BUT EACH IS WELL KNOWN, COMPETENT POLITICIAN FROM FAMILY IMPORTANT IN STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE. O' HIGGINS' EARLY LEAD IS BASED ON HIS GOOD PERFORAMCNE IN 1966, WHEN HE RAN AGAINST DE VALERA AND NARROWLY MISSED UPSETTING HIM . IN DUBLIN URBAN AREA, O' HIGGINS WON LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ALMOST 50 PERCENT MORE VOTES THAN DE VALERA, AND DUBLIN HAS NOW INCREASED IN SIZE. FROM OUR CONVERSATIONS, HOWEVER, WE GATHER THAT MANY WHO VOTED FOR O' HIGGINS WERE MAINLY PROTESTING AGAINST ANOTHER SEVEN YEARS OF DE VALERA, WHO WAS WIDELY SEEN AS TOO OLD FOR OFFICE. MANY BELIEVED THAT FIANNA FAIL WAS ATTEMPTING CYNICAL STUNT IN USING ANCIENT FIGURE FOR MODERN POLITICS.

THIS FACOR WILL NOT BE PRESENT IN 1973, SO CLOSE
RACE IN QUITE POSSIBLE.

6 BOTH CANDIDATES WOULD PROBABLY KEEP PROMISES TO
SEARCH ACTIVELY FOR WAYS TO EXPAND PRESIDENT' S ROLE.
NOT CLEAR TO US, HOWEVER, WHERE THEY COULD FIND ROOM
UNDER CONSTITUTION TO DO SO, EXCEPT IN FIELD OF PUBLIC
RELATIONS-- PERHAPS INVOLVING FOREIGN TRAVEL. ANOTHER EXCEPTION
WOULD BEIN NATIONAL EMERGENCY OF A KIND VINVOLING
PARLIAMENTARY BREAKDOWN. PRESIDENCY' S RESERVE POWERS
COULD THEN BECOME SIGNIFICANT FOR FIRST TIME. IN
EVENT OF SUCH UNLIKELY CONTINGENCY, CHILDERS AND
O' HIGGINS WOULD SEEM TO HAVE BASICALLY SIMILAR
INCLINATIONS. BOTH SEEK IRISH UNITY THROUGH ENTIRELY
PEACEFUL MEANS; BOTH ARE FRIENDLY TO U. S. PRESIDENTIAL
RACE THEREFORE HAS LITTLE RELEVANCE TO REAL POWER
STRUCTURE AND LITTLE INTERNTIONAL INTERESTS, THOUGH
IT WILL BE WATCHED CLOSELY INSIDE IRELAND. SORENSON

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